S/N: 09/880,424

#4

PATENT

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Applicant:	Morrow et al.	Examiner:	Filipczyk, M.
Serial No.:	09/880,424	Group Art Unit:	2171
Filed:	June 13, 2001	Docket No.:	60001.0037US01
		MS Docket No.:	149446.1

Title: Answer Wizard Drop-Down Control

CERTIFICATE UNDER 37 CFR 1.8:
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BRIEF ON APPEAL

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This is an appeal from the Office Action mailed on January 15, 2004 finally rejecting claims 1-12.

This Brief is being filed in triplicate. The fee required under 37 CFR §1.17(c) for the appeal should be charged to Deposit Account No. 13-2725. Appellants request the opportunity for a personal appearance before the Board of Appeals to argue the issues of this appeal. The fee for the personal appearance will be timely paid upon receipt of the Examiner's Answer.

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REAL PARTY IN INTEREST

The real party in interest is Microsoft Corp. of Redmond, Washington.

RELATED APPEALS AND INTERFERENCES

The assignee, the assignee's legal representatives, and the patent applicants submit that there are no related appeals or interferences that are directly affected by or have a bearing on the Board's decision in this appeal.

STATUS OF CLAIMS

Claims 1-12 are pending in the present application. Claims 1-12 were rejected in a Final Office Action dated January 15, 2004. Each of the rejected claims 1-12 has been appealed. A clean copy of the pending claims is attached as an Appendix.

STATUS OF AMENDMENTS

No amendments were filed after the Final Office Action.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Embodiments of the present invention are related to a method, system, and computer readable medium for providing an answer wizard edit/drop-down control 120 (Fig. 2) that provides users with access to help utilities, including help files and wizard provided by a software application. In an embodiment of the present invention, the answer wizard edit/drop-down control 120 allows a user to enter a question or search string regarding desired functionality of the software application. In response to the question or search string, a list of potential answers is presented to the user in a drop-down menu 130 (Fig. 3). If the user finds an acceptable answer to his/her question or search string in the list of potential answers, then the user can select the acceptable answer. In response to selection of one of the answers presented in the drop-down menu 130, a help window 140 (Fig. 3) with help text 145 is displayed to the user. An example is provided in the specification at page 9, lines 1-19 where a user has entered a question regarding the print functionality of an exemplary word processing software application and selected an answer from the list of potential answers provided.

In an embodiment of the present invention, each time the user enters a question or search string into the answer wizard edit/drop-down control 120, that question or search string is saved in a list of most recently used questions. Accordingly, the next time the user needs assistance, the user may access the list of most recently used questions 137 through the drop-down menu 130, as illustrated in Fig. 5. In an embodiment, the user may then, if desired, select one of the previously asked questions or search strings and rerun the query for a list of potential answers to the selected question. The user may then select the same answer or search string as he/she previously selected in order to obtain the same assistance as he/she previously sought when asking that particular question, or the user may select a different answer, thereby launching the help window 140 with different help text 145, providing the user with a different answer than he/she was previously provided as discussed at page 11, line 15 to page 12, line 14 and at page 13, line 24 to page 14, line 8.

ISSUES ON APPEAL

The following issues are on appeal:

1)   Whether claims 1, 3-6, and 8-10 are anticipated under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) by U.S. Patent No. 5,995,921 to Richards et al. (hereinafter "Richards").

2)   Whether claims 2, 7, and 11-12 are unpatentable under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) in view of Richards.

GROUPING OF CLAIMS

For the purpose of this Appeal, rejected claims 1-12 do not stand and all together. Rejected claims 1-12 are separately patentable for at least the reasons provided below in the "Arguments" section.

ARGUMENTS OF APPELLANTS

Rejections of Claims 1, 3-6, and 8-10 Under 35 U.S.C. §102(b)

Claims 1, 3-6, and 8-10 have been rejected as being anticipated under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) by U.S. Patent No. 5,995,921 to Richards et al. (hereinafter "Richards"). Reversal of this rejection is respectfully requested.

Appellants' claimed invention, as embodied in independent claim 1, is directed to a method for providing computer software help utility. The method includes the following claim features:

(1) providing a text entry area;

(2) receiving a search string at the text entry area;

(3) searching a database for answers responsive to the search string;

(4) displaying a list of potential answers responsive to the search string;

(5) selecting, in response to a user input, one of the potential answers responsive to the search string;

(6) displaying a help text responsive to selecting one of the potential answers;

(7) after receiving the search string at the text entry area, storing the search string in a list of most recently used search strings;

(8) retrieving the list of most recently used search strings; and

(9) displaying the list of most recently used search strings.

The teaching of Richards is directed to a system and method of providing information to a user by receiving user-defined queries in natural language and selecting the most appropriate answer from a plurality of potential answers. Richards teaches a process (illustrated in Figs. 6A-6E) in which a user invokes a help interface 204 by selecting a graphical help menu option 300, as illustrated in Fig. 3A. Upon selection, a drop-down menu 302 appears with further help options including an option 303 entitled "Ask the Expert" for invoking the help interface 204. A bar-shaped user interface 304 including an area 306 for entering queries in natural language appears upon selection of the "Ask the Expert" option 303. Once a user enters a query in the area 306, Richards teaches that the character string representing the user-defined query is read into and stored in a buffer 206. The character string representing the user-defined query is dynamically modified within the buffer as the contents of lists 214, 215, 216, and 218 are

compared to the contents of the buffer 206. As discussed in Column 5, line 13 to Column 6, line 42 and in Column 9, line 38 to Column 11, line 52, the character string representing the user-defined query in the buffer 206 is parsed and subjected to a number of iterative processes to eliminate extraneous and superfluous words from the character string, as well as to identify words or phrases relevant to selecting the most appropriate response for the user's query. Once all of the single and multiple word character strings, location information, noise words, and punctuation have been removed from the buffer during the iterative processes, the remaining contents of the buffer are discarded. After these iterative processes, Richards teaches creating an answer array based on the words identified as meaningful in the user-defined query. The answer in the answer array having the highest score is retrieved and presented to the user. The title of the answer is presented in dialog box 308, and the full text of the answer is presented in dialog box 310, as illustrated in Fig. 3C. The titles only of the second, third, fourth, etc. top ranking answers are displayed in dialog box 312 of Fig. 3C.

In the Final Office Action (Paper 8), the Examiner asserts that Richards teaches all of the elements of claim 1. In response to this rejection, Appellants pointed out to the Examiner by telephone interview on March 1, 2004, that Richards does not to teach a method for providing computer software help utility as recited by claim 1. Specifically, Appellants pointed out that Richards fails to teach that the user-defined queries are stored in a list of most recently used user-defined queries and that the list is retrieved and displayed. In the Final Office Action, the Examiner suggested that the "History" button illustrated in Figs. 3B and 3C of Richards teaches storing the user-defined queries in a list of most recently used user-defined queries after receiving the user-defined query, retrieving the list of most recently used user-defined queries, and displaying the list of most recently used user-defined queries. Appellants respectfully disagree. Richards fails to teach that after the user enters a query, the query is saved in a list of most recently used queries, and when the "History" button is selected, the list is retrieved and displayed to the user. In fact, Richards does not teach any functionality of the "History" button. Thus, Appellants assert that Richards fails to teach or suggest a method for providing computer software help utility as recited in claim 1 and assert that the rejection of claim 1 should be overturned on this basis.

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Additional claims of the present application are allowable over the rejection based on Richards. Claims 2-4 depending from claim 1 are allowable for at least the reasons noted above. However, these claims are allowable for additional reasons specified below. Note that claim 2 is discussed below in a separate section as claims 2, 7, and 11-12 were separately rejected.

Furthermore, independent claim 5 and dependent claim 6 are also allowable over the rejection based on Richards. Independent claim 5 is directed to a method for providing computer software help utility. Claim 5 shares a similar feature with claim 1, which is after receiving the search string at the text entry area, storing the search string in a list of most recently used search strings; retrieving the list of most recently used search strings; and displaying the list of most recently used search strings. As noted above in relation to claim 1, Richards fails to teach that the user-defined queries are stored in a list of most recently used user-defined queries and that the list is retrieved and displayed. Accordingly, the rejection of independent claim 5 based on Richards should be overturned for at least this reason. Furthermore, claim 6 depending from claim 5 is allowable over this rejection for at least the reasons noted above. However, claims 5-6 are allowable for additional reasons specified below.

With respect to the dependent claims of claim 1, claim 3 adds the features of allowing the user to determine whether an acceptable answer is provided in the list of potential answers; if an acceptable answer is not provided in the list of potential answers, allowing the user to refine the search string; searching the database for more answers responsive to the refined search string; displaying a second list of potential answers responsive to the refined search string; and wherein the step of selecting one of the potential answers responsive to the search string includes selecting one of the potential answers from the second list of potential answers. The Examiner fails to specifically address this feature in the Final Office Action, and it is asserted that Richards does not teach this feature. Accordingly, Appellants assert that claim 3 is allowable over Richards for this additional reason.

With respect to the dependent claims of claim 1, claim 4 adds the features of selecting, in response to user input, the search string from the list of most recently used search strings; searching the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting the search string from the list of most recently used search strings; displaying a third list of potential answers responsive to the step of searching the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting the search string from the list of most recently used search strings; selecting, in response to user input, one of the

potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers; and displaying a help text responsive to selecting one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers. The Examiner fails to specifically address this feature in the Final Office Action, and it is asserted that Richards does not teach this feature. Accordingly, Appellants assert that claim 4 is allowable over Richards for this additional reason.

Appellants' claimed invention, as embodied in independent claim 5, is directed to a method for providing computer software help utility. The method includes the following claim features:

(1) providing a text entry area on the tool bar of a software application data entry and editing window;

(2) receiving a search string at the text entry area;

(3) searching a database for answers responsive to the search string;

(4) displaying a list of potential answers responsive to the search string;

(5) allowing a user to determine whether an acceptable answer is provided in the list of potential answers;

(6) if an acceptable answer is not provided in the list of potential answers, receiving a refined search string at the text entry area, and searching the database for more answers responsive to the refined search string;

(7) displaying a second list of potential answers responsive to the refined search string;

(8) selecting, in response to user input, one of the potential answers from the second list of potential answers;

(9) displaying a help text responsive to selecting one of the potential answers;

(10) after receiving the search string and the refined search string at the text entry area, storing the search string and the refined search string in a list of most recently used search strings;

(11) retrieving the list of most recently used search strings; and

(12) displaying the list of most recently used search strings.

In addition to Richards failing to teach storing the search string in a list of most recently used search strings after receiving the search string at the text entry area; retrieving the list of

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most recently used search strings; and displaying the list of most recently used search strings, Richards also fails to teach additional features of claim 5. In particular, Richards does not teach storing a search string and a refined search string in a list of most recently used search strings, retrieving the list, and displaying the list. Figs. 3B and 3C of Richards shows a "History" button, but Richards fails to teach that after the user enters a query, the query is saved in a list of most recently used queries, and when the "History" button is selected, the list is retrieved and displayed to the user. Furthermore, the Examiner fails to specifically address this feature of claim 5 in the Final Office Action.

Moreover, Richards does not teach providing a text entry area on the tool bar of a software application data entry and editing window. Instead, Richard teaches that after a user selects a "Help" button and then an "Ask the Expert" button, a user interface appears, without suggesting that the user interface is provided on a tool bar of a software application data entry and editing window. Again, the Examiner fails to specifically address this feature of claim 5 in the Final Office Action. Accordingly Appellants assert that claim 5 is allowable over Richards for these additional reasons.

Claim 6 depends from claim 5 and is allowable over Richards for at least the reasons provided above for claim 29. However, claim 6 is allowable for additional reasons as well.

With respect to the dependent claim of claim 5, claims 6 adds the features of selecting, in response to user input, one of the search strings or the refined search strings from the list of most recently used search strings; searching the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting one of the search strings or the refined search strings from the list of most recently used search strings; displaying a third list of potential answers responsive to the step of searching the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting one of the search strings or the refined search strings from the list of most recently used search strings; selecting, in response to user input, one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers; and displaying a help text responsive to step of selecting one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers. The Examiner fails to specifically address this feature in the Final Office Action, and it is asserted that Richards does not teach this feature. Accordingly, Appellants assert that claim 6 is allowable over Richards for this additional reason.

In the Final Office Action, the Examiner rejects claims 8-10 under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by Richards. However, since claims 8-10 depend from claim 7, which the Examiner rejects under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Richards, claims 8-10 are discussed below with regards to the rejection of independent claim 7 under 35 U.S.C. §103.

Rejections of Claims 2, 7, and 11-12 Under 35 U.S.C. §103(a)

Claims 2, 7, and 11-12 have been rejected as being anticipated under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) by Richards. Reversal of this rejection is respectfully requested.

Claim 2 is dependent upon claim 1 and is allowable over the rejection of Richards because, as established above for claim 1, Richards fails to teach that the user-defined queries are stored in a list of most recently used user-defined queries and that the list is retrieved and displayed.

Appellants' claimed invention, as embodied in independent claim 7, is directed to a computer readable medium having stored thereon computer-executable instructions. The computer-executable instructions perform the following claim features:

(1) providing a text entry area;

(2) receiving a search string at the text entry area;

(3) searching a database for answers responsive to the search string;

(4) displaying a list of potential answers responsive to the search string;

(5) selecting, in response to user input, one of the potential answers responsive to the search string;

(6) displaying a help text responsive to selecting one of the potential answers;

(7) after receiving the search string at the text entry area, storing the search string in a list of most recently used search strings;

(8) retrieving the list of most recently used search strings; and

(9) displaying the list of most recently used search strings.

A description of the teaching of Richards may be relied upon from above.

In the Final Office Action (Paper 8), the Examiner asserts Richards teaches all the elements of claim 7 except that the text input box is on the tool bar of a software application. However, Appellants note that claim 7 does not include the element of providing the text entry

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area on the tool bar of a software application data entry and editing window. With regard to the remaining elements, Appellants pointed out to the Examiner by telephone interview on March 1, 2004, that Richards fails to teach or suggest that the user-defined queries are stored in a list of most recently used user-defined queries and that the list is retrieved and displayed. In the Final Office Action, the Examiner suggested that the "History" button illustrated in Figs. 3B and 3C of Richards teaches storing the user-defined queries in a list of most recently used user-defined queries after receiving the user-defined query, retrieving the list of most recently used user-defined queries, and displaying the list of most recently used user-defined queries. Appellants respectfully disagree. Richards fails to teach or suggest that after the user enters a query, the query is saved in a list of most recently used queries, and when the "History" button is selected, the list is retrieved and displayed to the user. In fact, Richards does not teach any functionality of the "History" button. Furthermore, Richards teaches that a user-defined query is stored in a buffer, and after a number of iterative processes are used to eliminate extraneous and superfluous words as well as to identify words or phrases relevant to selecting the most appropriate response to the user's query, any remaining contents of the buffer are discarded, as discussed at Column 11, lines 48-52. Therefore, instead of suggesting that the user-defined queries are stored in the buffer for later retrieval and display, Richards teaches that any contents remaining in the buffer, after the iterative processes are used, are discarded. Thus, Appellants assert that Richards fails to teach or suggest a computer readable medium having stored thereon computer-executable instructions as recited in claim 7 and assert that the rejection of claim 7 should be overturned on this basis.

Additional claims of the present application are allowable over the rejection based on Richards. Claims 8-10 depending from claim 7 are allowable for at least the reasons noted above. However, these claims are allowable for additional reasons specified below.

Furthermore, independent claim 11 and dependent claim 12 are also allowable over the rejection based on Richards. Independent claim 11 is directed to a system for providing computer software help utility. Claim 11 shares a similar feature with claim 7, which is storing the search string in a list of most recently used search strings after receiving the search string at the text entry area; retrieving the list of most recently used search strings; and displaying the list of most recently used search strings. As noted above in relation to claim 7, Richards fails to teach or suggest that the user-defined queries are stored in a list of most recently used user-

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defined queries and that the list is retrieved and displayed. Accordingly, the rejection of independent claim 11 based on Richards should be overturned for at least this reason. Furthermore, claim 12 depending from claim 11 is allowable over this rejection for at least the reasons noted above. However, claims 1-12 are allowable for additional reasons specified below.

With respect to the dependent claims of claim 7, claim 9 adds the features of allowing the user to determine whether an acceptable answer is provided in the list of potential answers; if an acceptable answer is not provided in the list of potential answers, refining in response to user input, the search string, and searching the database for more answers responsive to the refined search string; displaying a second list of potential answers responsive to the refined search string; and wherein the step of selecting one of the potential answers responsive to the search string includes selecting one of the potential answers from the second list of potential answers. The Examiner fails to specifically address this feature in the Final Office Action, and it is asserted that Richards does not teach this feature. Accordingly, Appellants assert that claim 9 is allowable over Richards for this additional reason.

With respect to the dependent claims of claim 7, claim 10 adds the features of selecting, in response to user input, the search string from the list of most recently used search strings; searching the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting the search string from the list of most recently used search strings; displaying a third list of potential answers responsive to the step of searching the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting the search string from the list of most recently used search strings; selecting, in response to user input, one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers; and displaying a help text responsive to step of selecting one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers. The Examiner fails to specifically address this feature in the Final Office Action, and it is asserted that Richards does not teach this feature. Accordingly, Appellants assert that claim 10 is allowable over Richards for this additional reason.

Appellants' claimed invention, as embodied in independent claim 11, is directed to a system for providing computer software help utility. The system includes the following claim features:

(1) a software module operative

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(a) to provide a text entry area on the tool bar of a software application data entry and editing window;

(b) to receive a search string at the text entry area;

(c) to search a database for answers responsive to the search string;

(d) to display a list of potential answers responsive to the search string;

(e) to allow a user to determine whether an acceptable answer is provided in the list of potential answers;

(f) if an acceptable answer is not provided in the list of potential answers, to receive a refined search string at the text entry area, and to search the database for more answers responsive to the refined search string;

(g) to display a second list of potential answers responsive to the refined search string;

(h) to allow a user to select one of the potential answers from the second list of potential answers;

(i) to display a help text responsive to selecting on of the potential answers;

(j) to store the search string and the refined search string in a list of most recently used search strings after receiving the search string and the refined search string at the text entry area;

(k) to retrieve the list of most recently used search strings; and

(l) to display the list of most recently used search strings.

In addition to Richards failing to teach or suggest a software module operative to store the search string in a list of most recently used search strings after receiving the search string at the text entry area; to retrieve the list of most recently used search strings; and to display the list of most recently used search strings, Richards also fails to teach or suggest additional features of claim 11. In particular, Richards does not teach or suggest a software module operative to store a search string and a refined search string in a list of most recently used search strings, to retrieve the list, and to display the list. Figs. 3B and 3C of Richards illustrates a "History" button, but Richards fails to teach or suggest that after the user enters a query and a refined query, the query and the refined query are saved in a list of most recently used queries, and when the "History"

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button is selected, the list is retrieved and displayed to the user. Furthermore, the Examiner fails to specifically address this feature of claim 11 in the Final Office Action. Accordingly Appellants assert that claim 11 is allowable over Richards for these additional reasons.

With respect to the dependent claim of claim 11, claim 12 adds that the software module is further operative to allow the user to select on of the search strings or the refined search strings from the list of most recently used search strings; to search the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting one of the search strings or the refined search strings from the list of most recently used search strings; to display a third list of potential answers responsive to the step of searching the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting one of the search strings or the refined search strings from the list of most recently used search strings; to allow the user to select one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers; and to display a help text responsive to step of selecting one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers. The Examiner fails to specifically address this feature in the Final Office Action, and it is asserted that Richards does not teach this feature. Accordingly, Appellants assert that claim 12 is allowable over Richards for this additional reason.
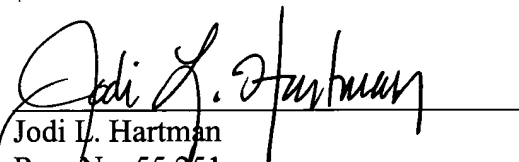
CONCLUSION

For at least the reasons given above, Appellants respectfully submit that none of the references relied upon by the Examiner anticipate or make obvious the claimed invention embodied in Appellants' claims 1-12. Accordingly, all of the above rejections to claims 1-12 should be reversed.

Please charge any additional fees or credit any overpayment to Merchant & Gould P.C., Deposit Account No. 13-2725.

Respectfully submitted,

Date: June 15, 2004

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APPENDIX

1. A method for providing computer software help utility, comprising the steps of:

    providing a text entry area;

    receiving a search string at the text entry area;

    searching a database for answers responsive to the search string;

    displaying a list of potential answers responsive to the search string;

    selecting, in response to a user input, one of the potential answers responsive to the search string;

    displaying a help text responsive to selecting one of the potential answers;

    after receiving the search string at the text entry area, storing the search string in a list of most recently used search strings;

    retrieving the list of most recently used search strings; and

    displaying the list of most recently used search strings.

2. The method of Claim 1, wherein the step of providing a text entry area, further includes, providing the text entry area on the tool bar of a software application data entry and editing window.

3. The method of Claim 1, after the step of displaying a list of potential answers responsive to the search string, further including the steps of:

    allowing the user to determine whether an acceptable answer is provided in the list of potential answers;

    if an acceptable answer is not provided in the list of potential answers, allowing the user to refine the search string; and

    searching the database for more answers responsive to the refined search string;

    displaying a second list of potential answers responsive to the refined search string; and

    wherein the step of selecting one of the potential answers responsive to the

search string includes selecting one of the potential answers from the second list of potential answers.

4. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

selecting, in response to user input, the search string from the list of most recently used search strings;

searching the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting the search string from the list of most recently used search strings;

displaying a third list of potential answers responsive to the step of searching the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting the search string from the list of most recently used search strings;

selecting, in response to user input, one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers; and

displaying a help text responsive to selecting one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers.

5. A method for providing computer software help utility, comprising the steps of:

providing a text entry area on the tool bar of a software application data entry and editing window;

receiving a search string at the text entry area;

searching a database for answers responsive to the search string;

displaying a list of potential answers responsive to the search string;

allowing a user to determine whether an acceptable answer is provided in the list of potential answers;

if an acceptable answer is not provided in the list of potential answers, receiving a refined search string at the text entry area, and searching the database for more answers responsive to the refined search string;

displaying a second list of potential answers responsive to the refined search string;

selecting, in response to user input, one of the potential answers from the second list of potential answers;

displaying a help text responsive to selecting one of the potential answers;

after receiving the search string and the refined search string at the text entry area, storing the search string and the refined search string in a list of most recently used search strings;

retrieving the list of most recently used search strings; and

displaying the list of most recently used search strings.

6. The method of Claim 5, further comprising the steps of:

selecting, in response to user input, one of the search strings or the refined search strings from the list of most recently used search strings;

searching the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting one of the search strings or the refined search strings from the list of most recently used search strings;

displaying a third list of potential answers responsive to the step of searching the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting one of the search strings or the refined search strings from the list of most recently used search strings;

selecting, in response to user input, one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers; and

displaying a help text responsive to step of selecting one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers.

7. A computer readable medium having stored thereon computer-executable instructions which when executed by a computer, perform the steps of:

providing a text entry area;

receiving a search string at the text entry area;

searching a database for answers responsive to the search string;

displaying a list of potential answers responsive to the search string;

selecting, in response to user input, one of the potential answers responsive to the search string;

displaying a help text responsive to selecting one of the potential answers;

after receiving the search string at the text entry area, storing the search

string in a list of most recently used search strings;

retrieving the list of most recently used search strings; and

displaying the list of most recently used search strings.

8. The computer readable medium of Claim 7 having stored thereon computer-executable instructions which when executed by a computer, wherein the step of providing a text entry area, further includes, providing the text entry area on the tool bar of a software application data entry and editing window.

9. The computer readable medium of Claim 7 having stored thereon computer-executable instructions which when executed by a computer, after the step of displaying a list of potential answers responsive to the search string, further perform the steps of:

allowing the user to determine whether an acceptable answer is provided in the list of potential answers;

if an acceptable answer is not provided in the list of potential answers, refining in response to user input, the search string, and searching the database for more answers responsive to the refined search string;

displaying a second list of potential answers responsive to the refined search string; and

wherein the step of selecting one of the potential answers responsive to the search string includes selecting one of the potential answers from the second list of potential answers.

10. The computer readable medium of Claim 7 having stored thereon computer-executable instructions which when executed by a computer, further perform the steps of:

selecting, in response to user input, the search string from the list of most recently used search strings;

searching the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting the search string from the list of most recently used search strings;

displaying a third list of potential answers responsive to the step of

searching the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting the search string from the list of most recently used search strings;

selecting, in response to user input, one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers; and

displaying a help text responsive to step of selecting one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers.

11. A system for providing computer software help utility, comprising:

a software module operative

to provide a text entry area on the tool bar of a software application data entry and editing window;

to receive a search string at the text entry area;

to search a database for answers responsive to the search string;

to display a list of potential answers responsive to the search string;

to allow a user to determine whether an acceptable answer is provided in the list of potential answers;

if an acceptable answer is not provided in the list of potential answers, to receive a refined search string at the text entry area, and to search the database for more answers responsive to the refined search string;

to display a second list of potential answers responsive to the refined search string;

to allow a user to select one of the potential answers from the second list of potential answers;

to display a help text responsive to selecting one of the potential answers;

to store the search string and the refined search string in a list of most recently used search strings after receiving the search string and the refined search string at the text entry area;

to retrieve the list of most recently used search strings; and

to display the list of most recently used search strings.

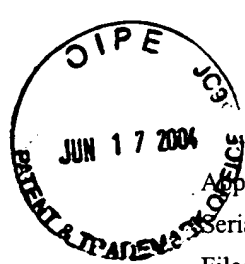12. The system of Claim 11, the software module further operative:

to allow the user to select one of the search strings or the refined search strings from the list of most recently used search strings;

to search the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting one of the search strings or the refined search strings from the list of most recently used search strings;

to display a third list of potential answers responsive to the step of searching the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting one of the search strings or the refined search strings from the list of most recently used search strings;

to allow the user to select one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers; and

to display a help text responsive to step of selecting one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers.

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IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Applicant:	Morrow et al.	Examiner:	Filipczyk, M.
Serial No.:	09/880,424	Group Art Unit:	2171
Filed:	June 13, 2001	Docket:	60001.0037US01/MS#149446.1
Due Date:	June 15, 2004		
Title:	ANSWER WIZARD DROP-DOWN CONTROL		

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By: Jodi L. Hartman
Name: Jodi L. Hartman

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